



Members of the Fox River Ecosystem Partnership learn about soil heritage and what it tells us about its history at a FREP Noon Network. Photo by Tammy Miller

@ORC

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Making Connections: Past Programs Paved the Way for Continued Successes

By Lynn Boerman, *Private Lands Section*

Working as the Northern Illinois Coordinator includes a mix of meetings throughout the region; participating on work groups and committees, handing the necessary follow up reports in office, field easement monitoring and most importantly, the coordinating of programs with partners throughout the region. Frequently, my attendance at meetings is the only IDNR staff representation - not a far stretch from the reality of the Conservation 2000 (C2000) Program in its early years. To understand how work changes over time sometimes you need to go back to the beginning to see the whole picture.

In 1995 the General Assembly initiated C2000, a comprehensive, six-year, \$100 million initiative, designed to take a holistic, long-term approach to protecting and managing Illinois' natural resources, focusing on private land which

makes up more than 90% of the state of Illinois, of which 75% is farmland. In August of 1999, with overwhelmingly support for the program, House Bill 1746 was signed into law extending the C2000 until 2009. A few years later in 2008, House Bill 1780 was signed into law as Public Act 95-0139, extending the program to 2021 and renaming the highly successful program as "Partners for Conservation". The C2000/Partners for Conservation Program funded programs at IDNR, Illinois Department of Agriculture, and Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

Unique to this program is it requires local stakeholders and citizens to engage in all aspects of the program and it recognizes the challenges the State of Illinois faces in its effort to manage natural resources and preserve and enhance biological resources on a landscape scale.



Lynn Boerman came to the IDNR in 2003 as the Northern Illinois Coordinator / Ecosystem Administrator for C2000.

She has volunteered for many years at the local park districts and forest preserves working with local stakeholders.

Lynn lives in Batavia with her husband, Robert, and two children JP (11) and Emma (7) and their dog, Hawkeye (1).

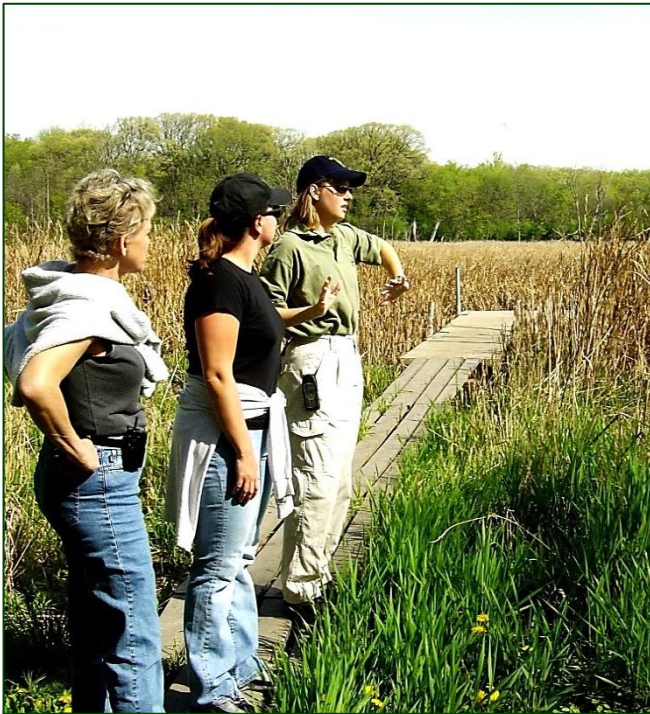
Lynn enjoys reading, baseball & hockey, and a variety of recreational activities while spending time with her family.

Lynn received both her undergraduate and graduate degrees from Elmhurst College.

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The call for broad-based, multi-disciplinary solutions to ecological problems were explored by the Water Resources and Land Use Priorities Task Force and by Illinois' First and Second Conservation Congresses. These realistic, goal-driven recommendations are bringing the dawn of a new age to land management in Illinois. Participants in these public involvement processes believe that it is possible to have and preserve the natural resources of Illinois through ecosystem-based management and through protection and enhancement strategies that are matched to each ecosystem.



Nancy Williamson, left, Lynn Boerman, center, and Alice Eastman right, formerly of Downer's Grove Park District, discuss the C2000 grant project at Lacey Creek

Early efforts to preserve and enhance Illinois' natural resources have traditionally been focused in nature preserves, parks, fish and wildlife areas owned by public agencies and dedicated to public recreation. Protection of landscape scale resources requires a broad involvement from private landowners and community interests and a collaborative role for the State in promoting conservation efforts. At its peak, the C2000/Partners in Conservation program saw 42 functioning ecosystem partnerships that covered more than 85% of the state. These partnerships were made up of private landowners, businesses, scientists, environmental organizations, recreational enthusiasts and policy makers united by a common interest in the natural resources of their watershed community.

Today, without funding, many Ecosystem partnership have been nonexistent, however, there are still some active C2000/Partners for Conservation ecosystems partnerships who are still making connections, collaborating, and making great things happen.. I continue to work with several functioning ecosystem partnerships, as well as, the established working members from the former partnerships (local stakeholders) to accomplish the vision of C2000 with new efforts. The following are a few success stories that I had and continue to have the privilege of being a part of within the region.

The Fox River Ecosystem Partnership (FREP) was founded in 1996, by multiple partners who came together to begin the partnership work under the, then new, IDNR C2000 Program. This year FREP is celebrating its 20th anniversary and it's still meeting and networking over natural resource issues in both the Illinois and Wisconsin Fox River watershed. FREP holds monthly gatherings that alternate between executive council/member meetings or noon network project-focused meetings. Municipal staff, county staff, consulting firms, Forest Preserve District's, SWCDs and NGOs share the responsibility of maintaining FREP's 501C3 and holding officer positions. A part-time communications manager maintains a Fox River Ecosystem Partnership website and newsletter called "Downstream." (Foxriverecosystem.org) The website holds expansive archives of the meetings, partnership work, project presentations and newsletters throughout the years.



In 2014 the Fox Partnership got together with the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission to hold the first bi-state Fox River Summit. Annual Fox River summits have since seen a widening of networking across state lines with presentations on large-scale projects such as the Fox River Study Group which focuses nutrients and local treatment plants, USGS studies, the bi-state Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge and regional water supply issues. The benefits of the original Conservation 2000 networking continue with the formation of the bi-state group now working for a Fox River National Water Trail designation, spawned by this Summit. Working on this commission gives IDNR the opportunity to be a partner on great things happening within the region – continuing the relationship from C2000.



FREP has joined with the Southeast Wisconsin Fox River Partnership and the Village of Waterford, Wisconsin, to pursue the designation of all or portions of the Fox River in Wisconsin and Illinois as a National Water Trail through the National Park Services' National Water Trail System. Technical assistance from the NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program has been awarded and planning is now proceeding.

The **Conservation Foundation** is working across county borders in the Chicago Metro area to expand its Conservation@Home and Conservation@Work programs. The programs help individual property owners create yards that are environmentally friendly and encourages large-scale property owners transform landscapes for the benefit of wildlife, people and the environment. Over the past several years, the Conservation@Home program has helped more than 700 property owners turn their patches of earth, big or small, into water-conserving havens for wildlife, bursting with beauty and working to keep nature in balance.

Some of the largest landholders around are businesses, schools and churches whose properties offer a tremendous opportunity to impact water



Those who employ these principles earn Conservation@Work certification, receive a sign recognizing their efforts and one-on-one advice about ways to make an even more positive environmental impact on their property.

quality and wildlife in the region. The Conservation@Work program educates business owners and organizational leaders on the benefits of native plants, ways to conserve the rainwater that falls on their land, proper management of invasive species, and how to reduce chemical use and watering. These practices not only help preserve and restore our natural environment, but they can drastically reduce maintenance costs while providing shelter for beneficial wildlife and beautiful outdoor spaces to enhance employee and customer satisfaction.



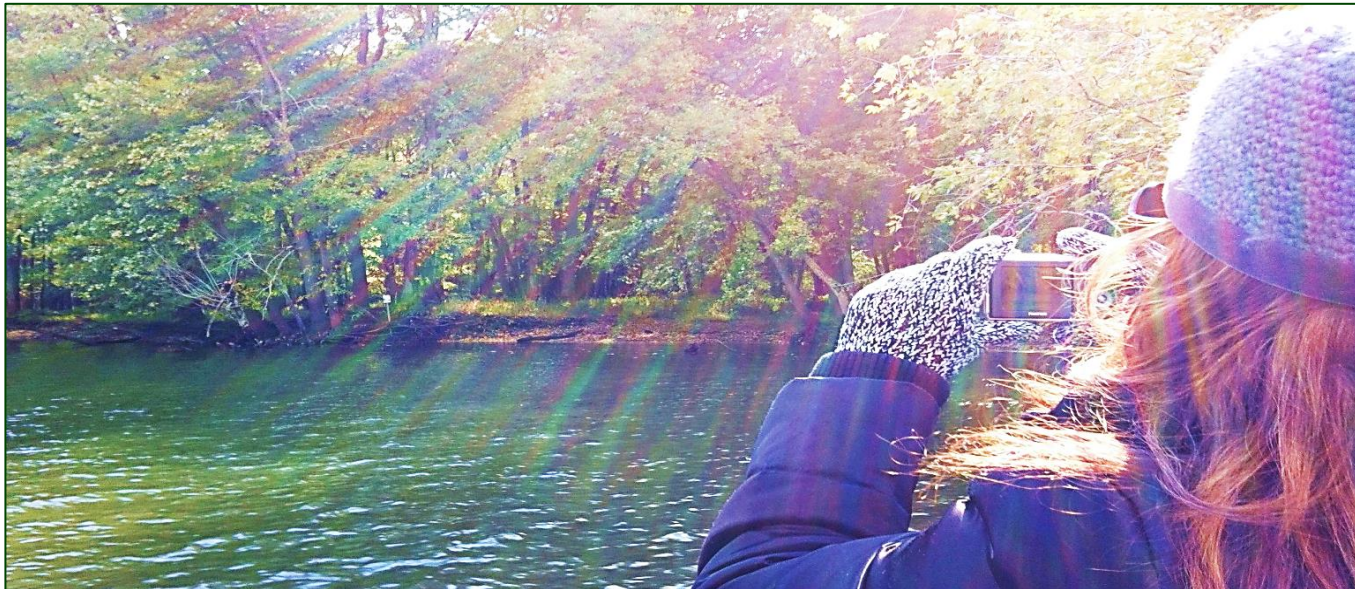
Proposed Homer Township Rain Garden
Photo courtesy of Marcia Devivo

Most recently Homer Township (a partner from **Lower DesPlaines Partnership**) contacted me about rain gardens & native plants. This was a great opportunity to share the information about the Conservation@Work program and start the process. This is a great example of how the former C2000 partnership members and IDNR continue to work together to enhance and restore biological diversity.

Who would of thought C2000 easements along the Kankakee River would ever be considered as part of a National Wildlife Refuge? While conducting the annual easement inspection last fall, John Rogner, US Fish & Wildlife, asked to join me for the day and we met with Jim Carter and Dave Zack, both volunteers for the Kankakee River Conservancy District of Illinois. From there, the Midwest Region of the U. S.

resource managers have led the way in ecological restoration, using science and on-the-ground experience to develop best practices.

In an effort to recognize high-quality restoration sites and develop professional standards of excellence in natural resource management and ecological restoration, a Chicago Wilderness working group



Kankakee easement monitoring by Lynn Boerman

Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) formally established the **Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area (NWR&CA*** on May 25, 2016 with the acceptance of a 66-acre donation from Friends of the Kankakee. Though the full refuge will take decades to build, the areas bought by C2000 several years ago will play into knitting the refuge together with protected lands from many players and sources.

Tom Melius, US FWS Midwest Director noted:

“Establishing the refuge and conservation area formally recognizes decades of work with conservation partners.”

Chicago Wilderness (C2000/Partners for Conservation Ecosystem Partnership) is a regional alliance of organizations working together to restore nature and improve the quality of life for all who live here, by protecting the lands and waters on which we all depend. One of the key initiatives of Chicago Wilderness is to restore the health of local nature, using the Chicago Wilderness Biodiversity Recovery Plan as the guide. Many Chicago Wilderness natural developed the Excellence in Ecological Restoration

Program (EERP). The EERP Steering Committee, on which I participate, worked for a number of years to develop the standards and parameters for the program.

The EERP’s primary purpose is to establish best management practices to improve ecological restoration management in the Chicago Wilderness region and across the nation through a voluntary broad assessment process. Working on the EERP Commission I’m able to use my previous experience and knowledge from easement monitoring and apply to the site accreditation inspection and ranking. With EERP, incredible sites are being recognized and awarded Platinum, Gold, Silver and Bronze designations.

Even with all the great accomplishments over the last 2 decades - whether during the C2000 program’s affluent years or afterwards - there is still so much to do and so many opportunities to build upon what was once started from the original C2000 Program. I’m looking forward to expanding connections and collaborations with partners and foster great projects within the region.